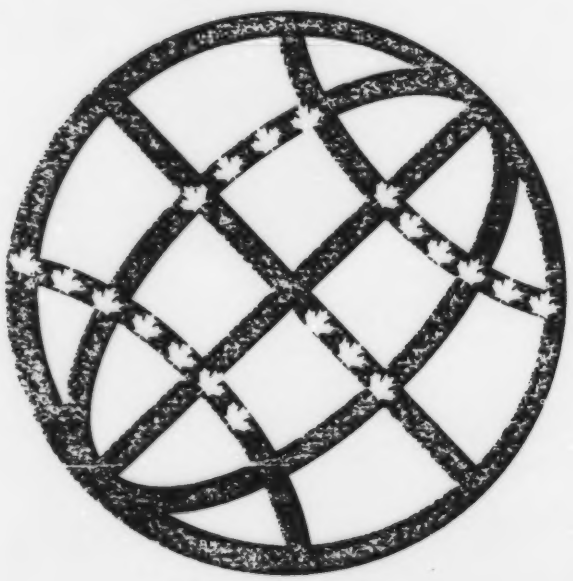
Canadian Centre
For Foreign Policy
Development

Centre canadien
pour le développement
de la politique étrangère

# EDUCATION AND THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA)

**Policy Option Report by**
**Initiatives for Democratic Education in the Americas**
**(IDEA)**

**July 13, 1999**
**Vancouver, BC**



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Policy Option Report for:

**Education and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA):**

# Initiatives for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA) - Canadian Consultation

**Vancouver BC, July 13 1999**

**Total Number of Delegates to Consultation: 68***
Total Female Delegates: 30
Total Youth and Student Delegates: 28
Age Range: 15 to 65

**Total Organizations Represented: 34**
Educators Organizations: 14
Total Youth and Student Organizations: 8
NGO's: 5
Government and Parastatal: 5

**A list of the names of organizations and delegates, and their contact numbers is attached at the end of this report.*

**Objectives:**
The Canadian IDEA Consultation had two objectives:

1. to raise awareness among education stakeholders in Canada of the Americas Summit Process, the Inter-American Program of Education and their potential impact on education in Canada and other American Countries, and;
2. to provide an opportunity for Canadian organizations involved in education to debate the key documents developed for the Hemispheric Initiatives for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA) Conference that will bring together representatives of education stakeholders from 25 American countries to discuss hemispheric education issues in Quito, Ecuador next September 29 - October 3.

**Format:** The Day-long Consultation ran from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M. and was divided in three consecutive sections: Youth Perspectives, The IDEA Process, and Voices from Latin America

## Youth Perspectives:

45 delegates participated in this three and a half hour session aimed at raising awareness of the Summit of the Americas process and the Inter-American Program of Education, identifying the aspirations of Canadian Youth and Student organizations regarding education and, from that, developing recommendations to be presented to the Canadian delegates who will attend the Hemispheric IDEA Conference in Quito, Ecuador September 29 - October 3.

Following presentations by the Canadian Federation of Students and the BC Teachers Federation about the FTAA and the Inter-American Program of Education, delegates broke into theme-based working groups. The three themes were:

1) The influence of transnational corporations and sponsorships in Public Schools;
2) Youth goals and alternatives for education
3) Globalization and Youth Organizing

Following the working groups delegates regrouped in a plenary session to debate, modify and adopt the recommendations of each session.

The Reports, as adopted by the Youth Plenary are as follows:

### Youth Aspirations and Alternatives for Education

***Moderator- Civil Society Network for Public Education in the Americas***

Participants conducted a brainstorming session about what they sought in education. Then, employing document authors José Ramos and Carlos López as resource people, they examined the IDEA paper "Alternatives for Democratic Education in the Americas" to see how it matched the aspirations they had identified and to offer revisions to the documents.

The key goals for education outlined by participants and approved by the morning plenary were:

1. Education is youth's ticket to participation in society and as such must provide the knowledge and skills essential to democratic participation. It should not focus solely on training for the labour market;
2. Education should be seen as an integral part of society and not separate from it;
3. The corporate agenda is becoming integrated into the public education system affecting the focus and values development of youth;
4. Education should enable students to become independent and critical thinkers in order that they may evaluate issues and contribute to society. Learning processes and debate should take precedence over fact-accumulation and rote-learning in our education systems;

5. Education should broaden cultural understanding and global awareness;
6. Education should expose students to a wide diversity of points of views and options;
7. While education should prepare students to fill jobs needed in society, it should also facilitate personal self-development;
8. Education, work and society must not be mutually exclusive. Education should be closely linked with work by placing the student and education institutions at the service of society;
9. Education should play a key role in diminishing social disparities; for this reason all students, regardless of economic, cultural and ethnic background must have access to the same quality of education. The current trend of tying access to ability to pay or corporate sponsorship must be reversed.

**Comments on IDEA documents**

1. The "Democratic Education" document should include a proposal for facilitating access to a variety of types of education and flexibility in methods of delivery that allow for the special learning needs and living conditions of different people and social and cultural groups;
2. The structure of education and its delivery systems need to be flexible enough to reflect the differing needs and social contexts of communities;
3. Education must be integral and allow for the full development of children, youth and adults (i.e. Lifelong education);
4. Popular versions of the "Effects of 15 years of Neoliberal Changes to Education in the Americas," "Alternatives for Democratic Education in the Americas" and "Inter-American Program for Education" should be developed and circulated so that broader sectors may understand and provide input on these issues.

**Corporate Influence in Schools - BC Central America Student Alliance:**

A growing influence of Private Corporations in public education is manifest in the following ways:

- Exclusive marketing contracts with schools, colleges and universities;
- Corporate advertising on school materials and textbooks;
- The exchange of services and equipment in exchange for mandatory exposure of students to advertising (e.g. the Youth News Network provides schools with classroom television, but students are required to watch programs and commercials provided by the network);
- Public-Private partnerships in services, curricula and school construction;
- Contracting out of post-secondary education programs;
- Sponsorship of university chairs and study programs;

- University research funded by corporations reflects industry rather than social interests
- Development of curricula material by Corporations.

Delegates agreed that the increasing corporate presence in our schools was harmful for the following reasons:

1. Increased reliance on corporate funding undermines the ability of democratically elected representatives to make their own decisions regarding school policy and curricula;

2. Academic freedom is undermined when funding priorities for courses and programs are determined by private enterprise instead of the university body;

3. Student choice is eroded when one corporation has the exclusive right to market products on campus;

4. Corporate influence in the schools is not just commercial but also ideological. Often curriculum packages provided by industries push a narrow point of view that favours their interests on specific issues. On a broader scale, corporate marketing, sponsorships and curricula promote consumerism over conservation and individualism over cooperation; this endangers a fundamental value in education – access to a broad variety of world views.

5. Corporate influence in schools increases social disparities as companies tend to target more affluent schools that have a greater potential consumer base.

While the impact of corporate influence in Canadian education has so far been most strongly felt in post-secondary systems, high school delegates pointed out that in recent years business' influence at the k-12 level has grown more pervasive.

Representatives from Latin America spoke of the extent to which corporate influence has grown in southern schools where often whole campuses are plastered with soft drink logos and the only curricula materials available are those provided by companies.

Delegates agreed that it was important for youth and students to raise awareness of the impact of corporate influence in schools and to take steps to counter it. ***Since increased corporate control of schools undermines school-based and democratically-elected decision making and diminishes options available to youth, they felt that the trend toward corporatization goes against the democratization process in the Americas and must be opposed both within Canada and by Canadian representatives in international education fora.***

Delegates shared experiences they have had in their own schools in this area and outlined

a number of important activities:

1. Lobbying – both campus administrations, school boards and provincial and federal government bodies to present the arguments against corporate influence in schools – representatives of student organizations had experienced some degree of success in this and shared their experiences with the other delegates
2. Building networks to share experiences and tactics and to assess the situation in different campuses. Delegates resolved to form a network of student and youth groups working on this issue.
3. Legal action. Students at one school have launched a legal challenge to exclusive contracts on their campus.
4. On-campus awareness campaigns to raise student awareness of the impact of corporate influence on the quality of their education
5. International Networking. Guests from the US agreed to maintain contact with Canadian counterparts about similar issues on their campuses. Delegates resolved to request the Canadian student delegate to the IDEA Conference in Quito to discuss the issue with Caribbean and Latin American counterparts.

**Globalization and Youth Organizing - Youth Global Education Network**

This working group focused on the growing role of youth today as consumers
- How did this happen?
- How can youth resist the imperative to consume?
- How do youth become educated consumers?

Participants resolved that the Education system has a responsibility to help youth become literate consumers and to develop a critical analysis of the messages they receive about consumption patterns. Again, corporate influence in schools works against the development of critical thinking among young consumers since it promotes the purchase of specific products without a critical analysis of what is behind the label.

## The IDEA Process

The sixty participants in this four-hour session included delegates from educators, students, women's, government, international and non-governmental organizations. Participants discussed the FTAA and the Americas summit process and their potential impact on education in the hemisphere. They also discussed the IDEA process and its potential for strengthening education stakeholders influence in the Americas Summit Process and for developing alternative proposals for education in the Americas.

Canadian Teachers Federation President Jan Eastman explained the objectives of the IDEA process.

Penny Kerrigan outlined the objectives of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development and its role in the Canadian IDEA Consultation.

Canadian Mission to the Organization of American States Counsellor Darren Schemmer outlined the Americas Summit Process. In his presentation Counsellor Schemmer focussed on the non-trade aspects of the Summit process. He emphasized the importance of cooperation among American states to share resources and promote common goals in the development of social programs such as health and education. Schemmer also outlined the series of ministerial meetings on trade and social issues that will lead to the III Americas Summit in Quebec City in 2001.

Larry Kuehn of the Canadian Section of the Civil Society Network for Public Education in the Americas (CSNPEA) presented the IDEA research paper "Responding to Globalization in the Americas: Strategies for Education." Dr. Kuehn's presentation included an analysis of the OAS Social Development and Education Unit's "Inter-American Program for Education."

He warned that the increasing commodification of education under trade agreements such as NAFTA and those contemplated in the FTAA and the World Trade Organization's "Millennium Round" increase pressure toward the privatization of the public service and the removal of education policy making from the hands of national and local governments. He praised the OAS document for addressing problem of social and cultural inequalities in education, but expressed reservations about the document's tendency toward further standardization of evaluation methods as a step that could increase centralized control of curricula.

Using the "Inter-American Program of Education" as an example, Dr. Kuehn argued that education stakeholders must analyse each initiative toward globalization separately and take steps to ensure that their aspirations are taken into account during negotiations by supporting points that match such aspirations and proposing alternatives to those that do not.

Carlos López of the Central American section of the CSNPEA presented the IDEA paper "The Effects of 15 Years of Neoliberal Changes to Education in the Americas." Professor López placed changes to education in the Americas in the context of economic and social changes over the same period. With the decline and eventual collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rationale for the development of the welfare state in Latin America as a bulwark against "terrorist subversion" lost impetus. Dominant economic and political sectors in the region are now engaged in the process of dismantling the paternalistic state to replace it with another that favours the protection of private investment over social needs. López sees the development of regional trading blocs as part of this process.

The new state values education only insofar as it serves the needs of economic growth

and the generation of profit. Education is valued as a commodity to be bought and sold and as a service that provides industry with trained workers. It is no longer seen as a national project that promotes national social values and addresses individual and social needs.

Education in the Americas has become "rationalized" to make it more efficient in the market place. This has resulted in:

1. The privatization of many areas of education;
2. A moving away from pedagogical principles in favour of efficiency;
3. Internal competition between schools, teachers and students;
4. Changes in the curricula that favour competition and individual over social values;
5. Increased class sizes and reduced teacher salaries;
6. Centralization of evaluation and curricula;
7. Decentralization of financial responsibility;
8. A move away in curricula from humanist teachings to more easily measurable technical training;
9. Financial cutbacks to education systems;
10. Greater stratification of schools by social class and;
11. An increasing reliance on user fees to generate school funds.

Citing research on the impact of NAFTA on education in Mexico, López warned that a Free Trade Area of the Americas, if it contains clauses similar to those in NAFTA, will exacerbate the trends mentioned above, as well as bringing about greater homogeneity of American school systems at the expense of education oriented to social needs specific to each country.

José Ramos, of the Peruvian section of the CSNPEA presented the IDEA paper "Alternatives for Democratic Education in the Americas." Prof. Ramos outlined four different types of education in the Americas: that of the US and Canada which is relatively well-funded and based on advanced pedagogical principles; that of Latin America which is starved for funds and based on outmoded and transplanted education principles; that of the English-speaking Caribbean which is seeing the advances achieved during the 1960s and 1970s eroded by recent structural adjustment measures and; that of Cuba where despite a severe economic crisis in the early 1990s, education remains universal, of relatively high quality and closely tied to social needs.

Given this diversity of education in the Hemisphere, Ramos questioned whether education stakeholders in the region can share common goals. He argued that while educational objectives must reflect the realities and social needs of each country, there are general goals, standards and challenges that are shared throughout the Americas.

These include:

1. The provision of free and universal public education from early education through post-secondary;
2. An education based on solid scientific principles;
3. Experiential education that unites theory and practise, the workplace and school;
4. An education system that provides for the development of all aspects of the child and student's potential;
5. A values-based education that promotes tolerance, social commitment, critical thinking and democratic participation.
6. Life-long learning

Ramos added that education stakeholders in the Americas should also share the goal of improving teacher education so that in all countries it is university-based and prepares new teachers with the pedagogical skills and values required to fulfill the objectives mentioned above.

**Working groups:**

Delegates broke into two working groups: the first with a focus on the presentations and papers of Carlos López and José Ramos and the second focussing on the presentations of Larry Kuehn and Darren Schemmer.

**Workshop #1**

Much of the discussion in Ramos and López's group focussed on the devaluation of the teaching profession that has occurred in the past two decades. Delegates from Ontario spoke of the devaluation and attacks their profession has suffered from the provincial government in recent years. Ramos said that in Peru and Ecuador a campaign against the teaching profession and public education preceded funding cuts and privatization. If the public believes the public education is flawed, he said, they are less willing to resist attempts to dismantle it. For this reason it is important to propose alternatives for improving and strengthening public education rather than simply resisting neoliberal initiatives.

Some participants pointed out that the feminization of teaching is linked to the profession's devaluation. Since women's work tends to be less valued, a profession is undervalued when the majority of its members are women. Southern participants agreed that the number of female to male teachers in their countries is disproportionately high, particularly at the early education (100 percent) and primary (80 percent) levels. Delegates. Delegates agreed that the need to address this gender imbalance should be included in the "Alternatives for Democratic Education in the Americas" document.

Concern was expressed by some delegates about the emphasis on "scientific education" in the "Alternatives for Democratic Education in the Americas" paper. Delegates argued that science is not inherently positive and it is equally important to examine the interests

that science and technology serves. Ramos agreed to include a reference to the moral dimensions of science and technology in his paper.

**Decentralization**

The issue of decentralization of education systems sparked a great deal of debate among delegates, largely due to the fact that it signifies very different things in different contexts. Most agreed that decentralization of decision making and of some aspects of educational curricula can be important tools for providing the flexibility to meet regional and cultural education needs. Delegates agreed that the Canadian experience of balancing power between locally-elected school boards and provincial education ministries while maintaining a relatively centralized distribution of financial resources, has been largely positive.

In the United States, however, the process has emphasized the decentralization of financial responsibility. The tendency in recent education reforms in Latin America has been to import the latter model devolving financial responsibility for education from the national state to parents and municipal authorities. Delegates argued that this form of decentralization augments regional disparities in education quality and exacerbates class and ethnic stratification in the public education system. For this reason, decentralization, when understood in these terms, should be opposed by education stake-holders.

**Workshop #2**

Much of this workshop was spent discussing the impact the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have had on public education in Canada and the potential impact of future trade accords.

The delegate from the Canadian Federation of Students argued that the impact of globalization on education in Canada has been most strongly felt at the post-secondary level. Federal and provincial cutbacks to higher education budgets have encouraged administrations of learning institutions to transfer the financial burden to students. This has led to disparities both between regions, since in some provinces education costs are now much more expensive than in others (BC and Quebec), and between social classes as in the past 15 years, ability to pay has become the key determinant of whether or not a student can pursue higher education.

Student and post-secondary educators representatives were concerned that university priorities are becoming driven more by trade and economic demands than social needs leading to the devaluation of departments and programs that do not provide direct economic pay-offs.

Larry Kuehn said that Canadian education stakeholders need to keep a close watch on the negotiations regarding education that are part of the Americas Summit Process in order to support measures that strengthen accessible, quality public education and oppose those that threaten it. Kuehn also drew delegates' attention to new discussions in the World Trade Organization that seek to include education in the General Agreement on Trade in

Services (GATS). New provisions proposed by the United States government would require signatory nations to open their education systems, including the publication of text books and other educational materials, to competition from corporations and agencies from other countries. While public education would initially be exempt from the agreement, as soon as any level of government chose to contract out an education service it would forever more be open to international competition. Any preference shown for local, provincial or national service providers would be considered a trade violation and expose the offending nation to trade sanctions.

Government of BC Trade Negotiator Noel Schacter provided an insider's view of the trade negotiation process. He said that while many aspects of international agreements currently under discussion could affect the delivery of provincial services, most provincial trade officials are not well-informed of their potential impact. This puts Canadian provinces at a disadvantage in international negotiations.

Participants discussed the need to organize public awareness campaigns about the value of public education as a fundamental pillar of a democratic society and about the potential impact of trade agreements on public control of, and access to education.

## Voices from Latin America

This session was intended to be public session where international guests from Peru, Central America and the Caribbean would make presentations about the situation of public education in their countries and respond to questions from the Canadian audience. Since only about 30 people showed up, however, the format was change to an informal round-table exchange. Although it would have been nice to have had a larger audience, the new format allowed for a richer discussion that led to deeper understandings between Canadian education stakeholders and southern educators. The resource people at this session were: Clyde Pernell, President, Caribbean Union of Teachers, Carlos López, past-President, Federation of Central American Teachers Organizations and José Ramos, International Secretary, United Union of Education Workers of Peru (SUTEP).

*Steve Stewart*
*International Secretariat*
*Civil Society Network for Public Education in the Americas*

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| Total Participants : 68 Groups - 34 | | | | 48 | 61 |